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HAPPY ISLAND

CHILD POEMS

BY

Crawford Neil


IRENE OWEN ANDREWS

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CHILD POEMS

By Crawford Neil

DUBLIN:
Máire Nic Shiubhlaigh.

1916.

DUBLIN:
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PREFACE.

"I OFTEN think that the blessed dead who die in the Spring must know the life of renewal as the trees do, and their poor mute bodies take part in the birth of beauty. Who wouldn't like to die in the Spring, and see from the other side the Lord of Life sending out His angels to inflame the world with blossom and laughter." In the exuberance of strenuous life and the colouring of apple-blossoms, it seems sadly prophetic that the late Crawford Neil should have written such words only a few days before his death; and thus in the last letter to his dearest friend pour forth the swan-song of a soul so resigned to the movements of Beauty and so confident in Love that would pave a way for him through the cold passage of Death into the realization of Hope. During recent months many noble men have answered the summons of a high calling—many men of literary talent have died; and although wholly unconnected with the Rebellion, the young author of this book has passed away with that goodly company.

James Crawford Neil was born in Dublin about thirty years ago. From his youth he exhibited a genuine tendency towards literature, and for the past few years frequently contributed

studies in verse and prose to the Irish journals, and with the standard of his writings gained a meritorious reputation in literary circles. He also distinguished himself as a playwright, graceful musician, and lecturer on modern Irish Literature. While returning to his home on the Tuesday of that historic Easter Week, Neil was accidentally wounded in the spine, and after lingering for two weeks in silent agony, he peacefully died.

The selection of child-poems given in this little book was made by the author, and presented to the publisher last December. However, he withheld publication, and, after adding a dedication and epilogue, intended issuing the volume after Easter. Accordingly, the publisher offers "Happy Island" to the public in its authentic form.

Dublin children always appealed to the affections of Crawford Neil—children as we find them, playing among the red-bricked avenues of our city or romping in the suburbs—his life became one with their's in spirit and in song; and rightly so, for, when all is considered, is not child-life the glory of our existence and the beauty of our hope. While reading through the abundance of his unpublished work, I also discovered there this delightful simplicity, so characteristic of himself—lightly interwoven

with the imagery that gives us a Tagorean vision of childhood. And having known Crawford Neil intimately, I cannot hesitate in saying he has lived his poems as a finished artist in very word and deed. Our young poet has passed on with a noble song on his lips; the singer is now silent——but the spirit of his melodies shall find a sweeter echo in the nurseries of Heaven.

July, 1916. F. R. Higgins.

TO A DEAR SOUL.

I LOVE you, and your love shall be a light
To guide this blinded love of mine along
These desert shores, made glorious with your song,
Where death-sands wait my wandering in the night.
Love! when my love pursues its passionate flight
On lost, unwary pinions, towards a throng
Of mocking eyed desires, Oh! make me strong,
With swift denials, lest I lose the sight
Of golden liberties we walked alone.
In gentle love my passion thrusts aside
Love that has no poor need of time or tide
Nor even sight of my beloved one—
So take me, Sweet, your love shall be my guide
Through passionate skies or sulky mountain-side.

HAPPY ISLAND

THERE is an island in my dream
Where many-coloured parrots scream
And summer never goes.
For children, living wicked there,
Are never asked to comb their hair
Or worry about clothes.
But, on a golden, glittering strand,
We play like mice, or make a band
To chase the foolish Kangaroo
Through Happy Island—so we do!

Oh! where's the need to pause and think,
Or worry what's to eat and drink
Or heed the teacher's call—
Dad eats the neighbour's babies, but
We lads prefer the cocoanut
That's meat and drink and all!

So when our skins are burned quite brown
We throw our happy bodies down
To gambol in the surf:
Nor heed no big, blue polisman,
Long crocodiles, or girls that run
To hide behind the turf.
Then, down among the olive-trees
We creep and play at being bees
And paint our sunny faces blue
In Happy Island—so we do!

When Sunday brings the preaching round
We never hear a single sound
Of catechism or psalm:
The only bells that toll to-day
Come from the rock-bound, murmuring bay
Where ships wait in the calm.
And then we say most awful things
And never fear the devil's wings,
For Satan comes and plays with you
In Happy Island—so he do!

Up in a swarthy cedar-tree
Hangs our wee house, where you can see
The sea, all round about—
We eat and sleep among the boughs,
With a white squirrel and his spouse,
For ever camping out.
And we may sleep when everything
Has breakfasted, and taken wing
For labours new and old—
Ma robs no sleepy hours from you,
And if we sleep when day is blue
You never hear her scold.

But when the fickle-minded moon
Watches the swinging pink baboon,
And moths fly up and down
A milky ladder to the stars,
We sleep and dream of tramway-cars
That clatter through the town.

For, as we weary of the stories
Of pirate-men and battle glories,
We soon get tired of all the blue
In Happy Island—so we do!

SPRING SONG

WAKE up, violets,
Waken, little snowdrops,
Waken, gentle daffodils
And call my love to me;
Sing again, white sea,
Sing a song the spring wills
Snowdrops, violets,
Call my love to me!

Waken, laughter-light,
Children dear, awaken,
Wring the hope of every kiss
My sweet has given me;
White winds, lightly
Wake the joy our hearts miss—
Children, white winds,
Call my love to me!

Throw wide, heaven,
All the doors of springtime;
Through their shining portals
Call my love to me:
Call her sweetly
From the dead immortals—
White wind, blackbird,
Call my love to me!

SALLY MACK'S

OLD Sally lights her brassy lamp
Inside the sweetie-shop,
And Tom and I creep through the dusk
To taste her ginger pop.

She sells you bran from dusty bins,
White oats and oaten-meals
And milking-cans for dairy-men
And twisted wicker creels.

For gimp and hempen fishing-lines
And nets for stickle-backs,
There's not a shop in Dolphin's Barn
Can equal Sally Mack's.

When we have bought the Turpin-tale,
Bulls-eyes, and new top-laces—
She'll stop, and set her ferret-eyes
Upon our frightened faces,

And shout, "What lads are coming to
Is more than I can say—
Which of you threw daft Jimmie's cap
In here last Saturday?"

She has three pimples on her chin
And two above her eye—
I count them as she scolds, and Pat
Begins, (the coward!) to cry.

And then she gives some Peggy's leg
To Paddy from her store,
And we laugh loudly as we run
Away from Sally's door. . . .

But if you want a fishing-line
Or net for stickle-backs,
There's not a shop in Dublin town
The like of Sally Mack's.

THE SICK CHILD

LITTLE shapes of blue and gold
On the shadows make a stain,
Homespun coats behind the door
Turn to ghostly men again;
Though I hide my face away
Till the marching of the day,
He will haunt me as before . . .
Judas hangs behind the door!

I am sick, I lie awake,
Through the day it is the same:
Children play about the square,
Some of them cry out my name.
This is Tuesday, washing day!
How I long to slip away
To the fields where hawthorn buds
Drown the reek of soapy suds.

Archie Weymss caught a trout,
In a bath it swims about—
Wonder if it's sick at night
For the river and the light.
Archie mitched the other day,
He was put to bed, I heard . . .
He's a lad for snaring things—
(Wonder what's a humming bird!)

There's that nasty medicine,
Green and sticky like the burrs
That I throw in Nannie's hair
Till she flash those eyes of hers;
Wonder would it make me well . . .
Wonder would I go to hell
If I died before the light
Takes the night-gown from the night!

I would like to go to school,
Queer, but it's as true as true.
Mummy! is it morning yet?
Take that hat away with you:
It was making faces now
Like M'Cluskey's speckled cow
When he drinks in the canal—
Mummy! answer when I call.

Why, my forehead's wet, my eyes
Full of sleep, blink oft to rest;
There's a bird upon the beech,
Bubbling laughter in his breast;
Johnny's turning out the lights
In the street, he always fights
With the boy who climbs his lamps;
Horrid when he kicks and stamps.

And the light rolls inch by inch,
Slowly up the wall it goes:

I can read the Scripture text
Almost, now I see my clothes
Folded on the wicker chair,
Just as Mummy left them there;
There is mud upon the shirt
Where Tom threw me in the dirt!

"Pray the Lord my soul to keep!"
Wonder if He'd make me well;
Strong as any Bible boy—
Saul with grave Gamaliel,
David with his little harp . . .
Shepherd Amos . . . Noah's ark . . .

Hush! the day with odorous joy
Prays above a sleeping boy!

LULLABY

IN the breath of the dark
When the cows are home
And sheepdogs bark
Through the sleepy gloam.
Oh! come to my breast
With the first white star,
Can sorrow rest
Where the love-beams are?

When the winter is foul
And the swallows fly
From the frosty ghoul
To a warm, blue sky;
When the crow's high nest
Is a stormy car—
Oh! come to my breast
Where the love-beams are.

Go asleep, pretty one,
And leave sorrow alone
Though the blossoms, the sun,
And the summer are gone;
The cobwebs distress
Your dear eyes and your head,
So I'll kiss and undress you
And put you to bed!

THE CHARWOMAN

MARY comes to wash the floor,
Polish brasses on the door,
And a thousand little things,
While she working hard she sings—
"Dithery, dithery, Leatherhead,
My boy's asleep in the featherbed!"

Mary's hair is awful grey,
When I ask her, why, she'll say—
"Lad! I have a power of woes,
Scrubbing floors and washing clothes . . .
And dithery, dithery, Leatherhead,
My boy's asleep in the featherbed."

When I grow up, Mary dear,
I will buy you cans of beer,
And on Sunday we'll go down
And get married in the town!—
But "Dithery-day," was all she said,
"My boy's asleep in the featherbed!"

But, Mary; you'll have heaps of snuff,
Bread and cheese and apple-duff;
And the time will pass away
Easily from day to day.
But "Dithery-day," was all she said,
"My love's asleep in the featherbed!"

THE BEGGARMAN

IF you meet a ragged beggarman
Asking for a penny,
Never say, as any sinner can,
"Oh! I haven't any!"

You have pinnies white, and ribbons blue,
Birds of joyful feather,
When, with grace and laughter leaping, you
Run from school together.

Have you got a penny or a pear
Or some bread and butter,
Left from lunch, for him, then you will share
Joy he cannot utter!

If you've nothing, pass on tippie-toe,
Lest he begs a penny.
And you have to say, with cheeks aglow—
"Sir . . . I haven't any!"

JACK FROST

JACK Frost is old
And curly too,
His eyes are grey
And his nose is blue.
When winter comes
With snow around
He cuts big slides
In the iron ground,
And every little lad and lass
Can see his flowers on the window-glass.

GOODNIGHT

I HARDLY see you standing there,
Half in shadow, half in light,
Light winds brimming in your hair
That brushes fancies on my cheek.
Yet I have seen you every week
Since one a dozen moons ago,
And said the hard "Goodnight" I owe
To sleep-dulled eyes that look once more
Around the great, half open door;
I hardly see you, yet I see,
As in a haze of ecstasy,
A ghostly shadow made of you,
That bids me say goodnight anew,
A lock of hair that falls just now,
Upon the white and upright brow,
A glance which troubles me with pain,
To say goodnight; again—again.
Then, half in shadow, half in light,
I whisper through the murmuring rain,
"Goodnight to you, dear soul, goodnight."

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